5-1-2011

A Monday in January 2010

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol19/iss1/12
Luxury

Chris Marin

be there soon. on the el.
and everybody is
Pottering about beside
DOORS CLOSING,
prattling, or
still RedEyed
& the
Greek goddess of conquest,
aviatic patriotic fanny packs
and Che Guevera
all compete for our attention,
if not our hearts.
but look there!
a Tweety Bird
has alighted on one fleshy & stippled shoulder
everybody's a praxeologist
it's a rotating position
I rub a finger against my eye and
drop Zooey in my lap to speedily impart
yeah i'll stop @ liquor store.
& remove my backpack so one expressionless
child with pale stretch marks on her tummy &
a gold bracelet on her wrist
can sit next to me and
I smile at her.

Fitzgerald: A Monday in January 2010

Benjamin Fitzgerald

I wake up and look at the clock. 9:29. Crap! I'm going
to be late to Knutsen's class again! I hurriedly toss off my
blankets and rush to get my socks and shoes on. My mouth is
filled with the vulgar taste of food particles starting to decay
between my canines, but I haven't the time to brush. I'm more
concerned with making it to class early enough to at least
answer a few questions of the quiz. Grabbing my keys, phone,
wallet, I stop to turn off the damned alarm before I snatch my
vanilla yogurt from the fridge and rush from the room, racing
myself to L204. All the while I mutter horrible and possibly
untrue things that my therapist says I shouldn't say: "Damn
it Ben! What the hell is wrong with you? Why can't you do
anything right?"

Slinking into class with a prayer that I don't disrupt
my classmates, I take a seat next to the stickbug John
Greenwood. "Hey man, can I get a piece of paper please?"
Checking my pockets, I add, "Do you have a pen I can borrow?"
I'm sure John is not surprised by this, and bless his soul he
gives me one. Knutsen asks us to write the answer to some old
quiz question, don't ask me what, something about some book
I probably didn't finish because I work myself to death twenty-
five hours a week in the cafeteria. Fortunately, when the quiz is
over, she gives us a free-write; I love those things, so my mood
picks up.

Class over, I go to chapel and sit next to Sir Geoff, who
is both regally dignified and an assured nerd, and the bitingly
sarcastic Angry Tim. We talk about my visit with our jovial
Mexican buddy Jeremiah Drelleshak and his internship over at
the ELCA Queen Anne Lutheran up in Seattle.

“What's up with their theology? Are they just lazy or
something?” Tim asks, referring to the Evangelical Lutheran
Church of America. (Tim and Geoff are LCMS – Lutheran
Church, Missouri Synod.)

“I think they're just concerned with looking good,”
Geoff says.

“Well, the people were really nice,” I say.

“Yeah, people are always nice at church,” Tim rebuts.

I disagree. “I’ve been to churches where people don’t even talk to you. They’re no good.”

Next class is Renaissance and Reformation. I sit in the back, next to Edward O’Brien (whose hair mops down upon his face) and behind John. I should probably take notes, but I never do. I learn more just listening; besides, all I need is an hour of study before my midterm to get a good grade. Professor Brandt talks about the line of really bad Renaissance popes, and the furry teddy bear Philip Selway makes his customarily smartass wise-cracks throughout, adding a deliciously hilarious commentary to Brandt’s lecture. O’Brien and I banter back and forth a bit here and there, he’s also quite funny. My humor ain’t always as sharp as I wish.

The cafeteria special is some kind of undelicious-looking stir fry (stupid Mondays), so I go back to my dorm and heat up leftover pepperoni pizza from Friday. I put on some Beatles music and jibber around on Facebook.

“You really ought to be doing homework instead of playing Mobsters 2,” I note to myself, but I never take my own advice.

Bored of doing nothing and uninterested in reading Say it Like Obama and Win! for Doc Wright’s speech class, I turn on my Xbox and play some Beatles Rock Band. It’s seriously the best game ever. I can’t help but smile as I play “And Your Bird Can Sing,” “Girl,” “Michelle,” and “Ticket to Ride.” By the time I get to that last song, I’m singing as loud as I can. Music don’t get better than this. I mean it.

I go to Wright’s class, but since it’s speech, I really don’t care about it. After class, I walk down the stairs to Café 1905 and get a large peach yogurt smoothie with whipped cream and no banana. I make small talk with the friendly barista Emily and then debate with myself whether I should do homework or play Xbox. By the time I reach the room, I’ve made up my mind. I diddle on Caroline (my electric guitar, named after the Neil Diamond song) for a while, practice the guitar solo for “She’s a Woman” and screw off some bluesy licks. A little “Come Together” sounds like a good idea, and then my friend Chris from Sacramento invites me to an Xbox live party. Since I can’t talk well while playing Rock Band, I switch over to Uno, and win a game. “YES! An achievement!”

I tell Chris I have to go. It’s five o’clock, so I walk over to the cafeteria. My dinner consists of pepperoni and vegetarian pizza. My good friend Jared Barton walks in and I invite him over to my table to eat. He has class at six, so he can’t stay for long, but it’s not a big deal because I’m going to visit him tonight anyway. It’s a nightly ritual.

“See Jared, I’m eating healthy. I have a vegetable pizza.”

“Very good. But what are you drinking? Let me guess . . . diet coke.”

I laugh. “What do you think?”

Jared rolls his eyes and slams his hands on the table.

“If I die at forty, it’s God’s will.”

Jared shakes his head. We’ve been through this a million times before. But it’s time for him to go to class, so I go back to my room and goof around on Facebook until I get bored. By six-thirty I’m in the library, reading Shot in the Heart (a cheery, life-embracing work about a family haunted by its demons) for the Knutsen class I was late to that morning.

When seven rolls around, I move over to the Writing Center table at Café 1905, where my coworker Thomas York, famed for his giant afro, is already sitting. Nobody comes by except for some psychology person looking for help with APA citations, the one format most English majors know absolutely nothing about. Tom and I do the best we can.

Around 8:30, Linda Wade walks over to the café, her brown tangles bouncing after her. Dressed in a knee-high black dress and those nylon leg-stocking thing-whatevers that girls always seem to be wearing these days, this girl is seriously adorable. And I am seriously attracted to her.

“Hey Ben!” Her smile is chipper, her voice peppy and alive, brightened by the freckles highlighting her face.

“Hi Linda!”

“How’s your day?”

“It’s good. How are you?”

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I smile and turn back around, glancing at her wistfully every once in a while. Gosh she's pretty.

“Bye Ben!”

“Have a good night Linda!” There’s a sadness in my smile as I watch her walk away, but I tuck it in. I used to live by my hormones, and I’ve learned that’s foolishness. But now I’m the guy who suppresses his heart whenever it tries to beat. I feel like I’m alone on a boat on a storm-tossed sea, and everywhere I turn are the fins of great whites.

After work, I grab another smoothie and head back to my room. I’m in a Taylor Swift mood, so I play “You Belong with Me,” and “White Horse.” But the ending of the latter reminds me of Jennifer. Taylor sings, “I’m not your princess, this ain’t a fairytale,” and now I’m depressed. Jennifer is amazing, and I was crazy about her. But she left Concordia at the end of freshman year and I knew there was no point in telling her how I felt, so I didn’t. Instead, I made up fairytales in my head where I, the dashing romantic hero, ran to the airport in a frantic search for her. When I found her, I would kiss her and tell her I loved her, and she would stay in Portland and we’d live happily ever after. But I’m not a dashing hero; I’m a mangy mongrel. I’m not Ross and she ain’t Rachel. But I don’t really care for being depressed, so I play “You Belong with Me” again, and I get to feeling better, especially because I’m singing along. I like to put myself in Taylor’s point of view and pretend the girl I’m in love with is bisexual.

After throwing away too much time doing nothing (once again), I get frustrated with my lack of self-discipline and head over to Jared’s room next door, Elizabeth 12, to do my homework there. As usual, he is playing Eve Online. When my brother Sam met Jared, he described him as the archetypal nerd — corduroy pants and a receding hairstyle. I disagree; Jared isn’t any nerdiest than I am. I would be just as successful on The Beauty and the Geek as he, thank you very much!

We spend half the time talking, but it’s better then jacking off on Facebook. I’m trying to read over a short story from the Writing 352 class, but I keep interrupting my reading to complain to Jared about poor grammar in the story.

“Hey, what’s up?” he asks again. “You can’t do that! That makes no sense!”

“I know! That’s what I’m saying! You need a freaking comma there!”

Somehow, the conversation turns over to Jared’s tutoring, which he does on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

“The teachers are incompetent!” he wails dramatically, wildly flinging his arms about him. All of his movements are exaggerated; it is his most signifying characteristic. “The one teacher who knows how to manage the class gave all her authority over to the teacher who can’t manage the class! One of the teachers was yelling at the other teacher the other day, and almost made her cry!”

I laugh. “Wow, that’s bad.”

“Yes. There are fifty kids in the class, which is way too many, and the teachers can’t handle it. They’re constantly giving the kids rewards of some kind, trying to bribe them into behaving. But it doesn’t work anymore! They just ignore it. Now in a Montessori school, this would never happen.”

“Here we go again,” I laugh. Jared is an avid supporter of the Montessori educational philosophy. Once, I joked that when I go to Concordia for my MAT, the only thing I’ll know about education is what I’ve heard about “some dude called Montessori that my roommate always talked about.” Jared had scoffed then and said, “Montessori wasn’t a dude. She was a woman!”

“I don’t give a damn if she was a woman!”

In the present, I let Jared talk about Montessori. She’s really quite interesting, to tell the truth, but I like to jive people, and it’s very easy to push Jared’s buttons, so of course I make crack comments about Montessorianism that I don’t mean. It’s all in good fun.

I return to my room around midnight. I should get to bed, I know, but instead I turn on my Xbox. “Just one song,” I tell myself. The song I choose is “If I Needed Someone,” but as George starts singing, I realize this was a mistake, because the lyrics (“If I needed someone to love, you’re the one that I’d be thinking of”) remind me of Linda. To return myself to happier thoughts, I dish out another round of “Ticket to Ride” and,
despite the fact that it is 12:30 and I have class at 9:00, start singing along. “I think I’m gonna be sad,” but not today. “The girl that’s driving me mad” is doing okay. “She’s got a ticket to ride,” and I don’t care. There’s always tomorrow, and tomorrow is a new day.

On Losing a Friend

Christopher Marin

What are we?
A pair of pelvises, an electric charge under a blanket;
burned-down candles, sputtering black
a lake Panting like foxes in August.

Do you remember which night we made your bed our home?
And
supply exchanged jawbones for hearts; I took your foot in my stomach and you my kneecap in your mouth until we were metamorphosed. And now your left breast depends from my finger like a kid with a yo-yo, I hold your spleen in the shallow of my collarbone.

When I was young I found among the thousands a rare stone, floorboard flat and smooth,
to add to my collection.
It perspired as I fingered it in my pocket imagining it, long cool, in a purple velvet box or on the shelf above my bed, how it would enjoy the light.

& then mossy wavelets were lapping at my feet; looking, I tucked my toes in the sand and saw the faraway water; iridescent; a million pieces of a smashed gold necklace. Chest tight, shoulders in I peered over the water and expertly skipped my stone away.

... plunk plunk
I walked home, my fingers touching lint.

We talked under sodium lights with only cats to hear us
Now we breathe each other's very air,
you dream a world I dream who falls.